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ABSTRACT

From 1984 to 1993, California's Los Rios Community College District regularly conducted follow-up studies of completers and non-returning advanced-level students regarding their educational goals, outcomes, and levels of satisfaction. Over the 10-year period, nearly 33,000 students were surveyed, with over 15,700, or 48%, responding. Trends identified through an analysis of responses included the following: (1) over the period, the percentage of students citing occupational education as their primary goal for attending declined, from 61.2% in 1984 to 43.9% in 1992, while the percentage of students citing transfer to a university increased from 29.1% in 1984 to 47.7% in 1992; (2) student satisfaction with their educational experience remained high over the period, with between 87% and 90% giving ratings of 4 or 5 out of 5; (3) compared to other educational goals, students who listed transfer to a university included more females and more minority students; (4) among these students, over two-thirds had enrolled in a four-your college by the time they were surveyed, 17% had re-enrolled at a community college, and 14.5% had not re-enrolled; and (5) between 1984 and 1993, the percentage of respondents employed in jobs related to their college courses who rated their training as excellent or good rose from 69% to over 83%. (HAA)

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ED 403 967

Measures of Progress: Student Follow-up, 1984-1993
A Ten Year Retrospective

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Los Rios Community College District
Office of Planning and Research

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Los Rios Community College District Office of Planning and Research

MEASURES OF PROGRESS: STUDENT FOLLOW-UP, 1984-1993 A TEN-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

The educational goals and enrollment patterns of students in the Los Rios Community College District have changed considerably in the last ten years, according to a series of student follow-up surveys conducted by the district from Spring 1984 through Spring 1993. Survey responses indicated that interest in preparing to transfer to a university increased steadily during that time, while enrollment for occupational reasons declined for several years and then increased sharply in Spring 1993. The most recent study, ***Measures of Progress: Spring 1993 Student Follow-up***, also revealed two other abrupt changes: a sharp drop in enrollment for personal interest reasons, and a sharp increase in the those citing "college too expensive" as a reason for not reenrolling. Despite changes in California's economy and the imposition of ever-higher fees, however, respondents continued to express high levels of satisfaction with their community college experiences.

These are some of the trends identified through an analysis of responses from more than 15,700 former students who attended the district's three colleges--American River, Cosumnes River, and Sacramento City--during the 1982-83 through 1991-92 academic years.

Background

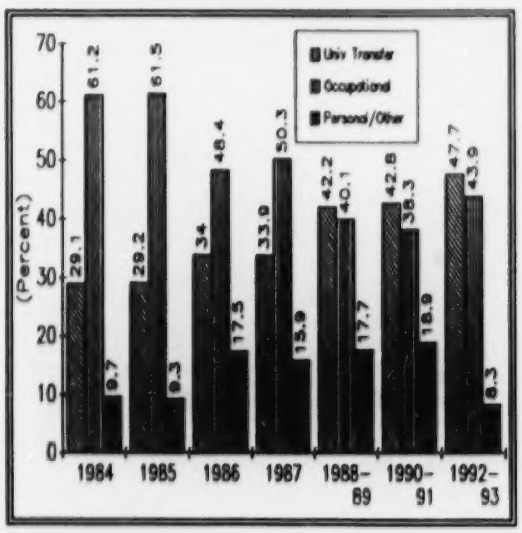
Student follow-up has long been a high priority of the Los Rios Community College District. Following a pilot effort in 1983, the district conducted follow-up surveys annually from 1984 through 1987, and biennially from 1989 through 1993. Because procedures were consistent in all seven surveys, the data were used to identify longitudinal trends. For each study, the population included all graduates and certificate earners in the year(s) being surveyed plus all nonreturning nongraduates who had completed an advanced occupational course during their last year of attendance (selected using Vocational Education Data System guidelines). Nearly 33,000 former students were surveyed and the adjusted response rate was 48% (15,700).

Survey results were aggregated for three groups of respondents, based on their self-reported primary educational goals: university transfer, occupational, and personal interest. This report describes these response groups, discusses some of the more important findings, and examines trends which have developed since 1984.

Educational Goals

The chart below displays the primary educational goals cited by respondents to each of the seven surveys.

Primary Educational Goal
While Attending a Los Rios College
(All Respondents)

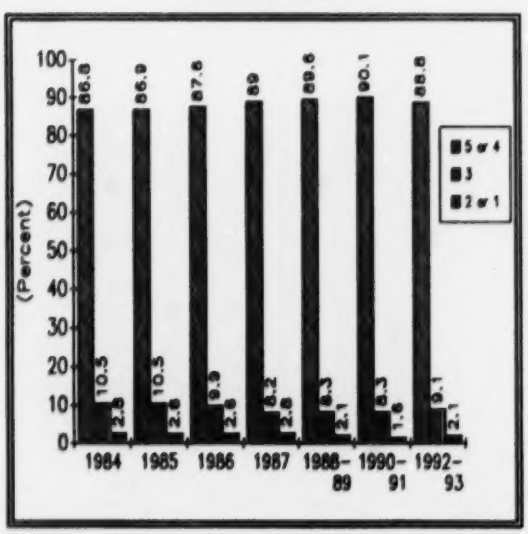


As the previous chart illustrates, the proportion of respondents who indicated their primary goal was university transfer increased steadily between 1984 and 1993 (from 29% to almost 48%). The proportion of those with occupational goals declined between 1984 and 1991 (from 61% to 38%) but then increased in 1993 to 44%. The proportion who enrolled for personal interest reasons almost doubled between 1984 and 1991 (from 10% to 19%) and then fell to only 8% in 1993.

Satisfaction with Educational Experience

Students were invited to rate various aspects of their college experience, using a five-point Likert scale (5 = highest rating). Characteristics rated included courses in their major field of study, college services used, general satisfaction with their educational experience, usefulness of their training in performing their job, and value of their college courses as preparation for continuing their education.

Ratings of Satisfaction With Educational Experience
(All Respondents)



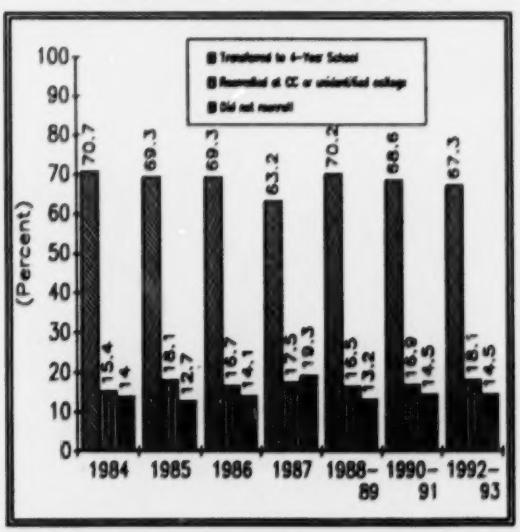
As shown above, student satisfaction with their educational experience in Los Rios was high in all the surveys: the proportion of respondents giving ratings of 5 or 4 increased from 87% in 1984 to 90% in 1991, and fell slightly in 1993.

Educational Goal: University Transfer

The proportion of respondents who said their primary goal was university transfer increased steadily between 1984 and 1993 (from 29% to 48%). Compared to the other two "educational goal" groups, the university transfer group included more women (58% in 1984; 65% in 1993), more minorities (26% in 1984; 36% in 1993), and more younger respondents (average age 27 in both 1984 and 1993). More than 87% of this group chose to complete a degree or certificate in 1984; by 1993, the percentage who did so was more than 92%.

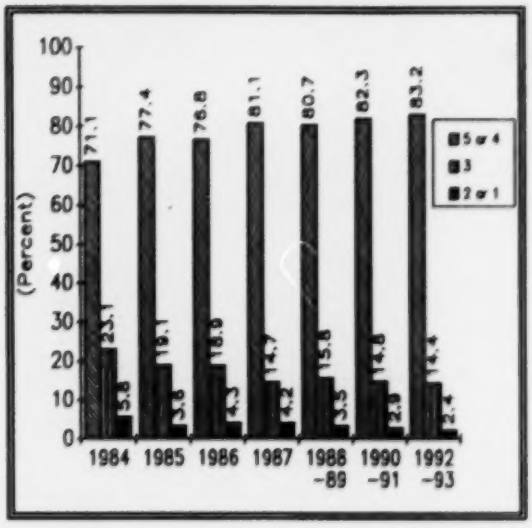
One of the most important findings of this series of follow-up studies is shown in the chart below: among those whose goal was university transfer, more than two-thirds had actually enrolled in a four-year school by the time they were surveyed. Another 17% had reenrolled at a community college, and only 14.5% had not continued their education. This is a strong indicator of the Los Rios colleges' transfer effectiveness.

Enrollment Status
(Primary Goal = University Transfer)



Students who had transferred to four-year schools gave increasingly high ratings when asked how well their community college courses prepared them for continuing their education. Their ratings are shown on the next chart.

Rating of Community College Courses as Preparation for Continuing Education
(Transfers to Four-Year Schools)



As shown above, ratings of 5 or 4 (5=highest rating) increased from 71% in 1984 to more than 83% in 1993, reflecting increasing student satisfaction with Los Rios colleges.

Educational Goals: Occupational Preparation/Retraining

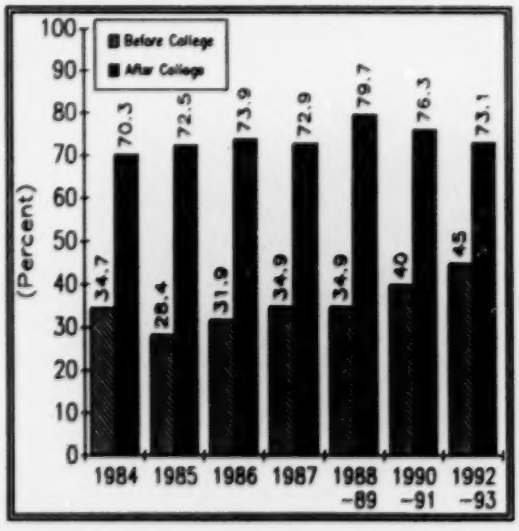
The proportion of respondents who said they enrolled in college primarily for occupational reasons declined substantially between 1984 and 1991 (from 60% to 38%), and then increased in 1993 (to 44%). The percentage preparing for a new job (occupational preparation) was 40% in 1984 and 30% in 1993, while the proportion who wished to upgrade their skills (occupational retraining) fell from 21% to 13% in the same period.

Although the students' educational goals were related, the demographic profiles of these two subgroups differed somewhat. The occupational preparation group in 1993 included more females (64%), fewer ethnic minorities (25%) and more younger respondents (average age 35.3 years) than the retraining group (females, 60%; ethnic minorities, 28%; average age, 36.5 years).

The proportion of females increased steadily in both groups between 1984 and 1993 but was always higher among those preparing for a new career. The percentage of ethnic minorities increased slightly in both groups during the ten-year period and was usually slightly higher in the retraining group. The most consistent difference between these two groups was that of age: until the Spring 1993 survey, the average age of those preparing for a new career was four to six years less than that of the retraining group. Each group's average age increased steadily from 1984 through 1991, but the average age of those seeking retraining fell by almost three years in the 1993 study.

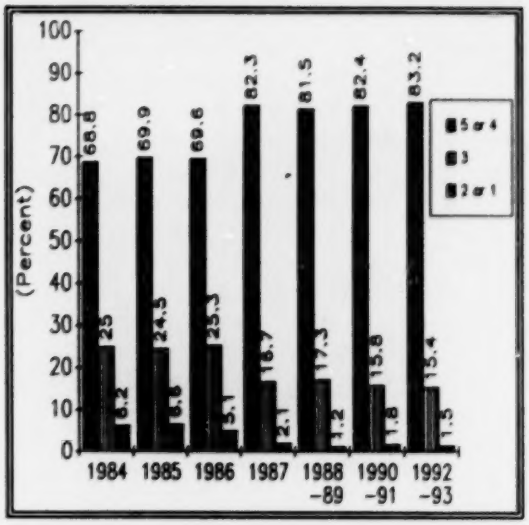
The chart below shows that over the ten-year period almost 75% of those preparing for a new career were employed in a field related to their college courses at the time they were surveyed, while only one-third had worked in that field prior to enrolling--an average increase of more than 35 percentage points.

Employed in Related Field
(Educational Goal=Occupational Preparation)



Ratings of occupational training in Los Rios showed consistent improvement over the ten years of the surveys. As shown in the chart on the next page, 69% of the respondents who were employed in jobs related to their college courses in 1984 rated their training as excellent or good (5 or 4). The percentage giving these ratings increased to more than 83% by 1993.

Rating of Training as to Its Usefulness on the Job
(Respondents Employed in Related Field)



These figures reflect the students' increased satisfaction with the occupational training they received at their Los Rios college.

Educational Goal: Personal Interest

The proportion of respondents who enrolled for personal interest reasons grew from 10% in 1984 to 19% in 1991, but fell sharply to 8% in 1993. Almost two-thirds of this group earned an AA degree or certificate, and almost half had transferred or reenrolled by the time they were surveyed. They expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their community college experiences.

Nonreturning Students (NRSs)

For each of the surveys, the responses of all nonreturning nongraduates (regardless of goal) were aggregated and analyzed to determine why they had enrolled, why they left without completing a program, and how satisfied they were with their Los Rios experience.

The majority of NRSs in every survey had enrolled to acquire or upgrade their job skills, not surprising since their inclusion in the surveys was based on their completion of an advanced occupational course. However, the proportion with occupational goals fell from 74% to 54% between 1984 and 1989 and then increased to 72% by 1992. Conversely, the NRSs interested in university transfer increased from 11% to 18% between 1984 and 1987 and then declined to 16% by 1993. The proportion of NRSs enrolling for personal interest reasons increased from 15% in 1984 to 29% in 1991 but fell to 12% in 1993.

When asked their reason for not reenrolling, 35% of the NRSs said they had completed the courses they desired, and 25% cited personal or family reasons. Fewer than 3% checked "dissatisfaction with quality of instruction," "dissatisfaction with course content," or "grades" combined. The percentage of NRSs who marked "availability of courses" grew from 7% to 10% between 1984 and 1993; the percentage who checked "college too expensive" remained around 1% until the Spring 1993 study, when it jumped to 7%.

Almost half of all NRSs said their educational goal required taking only selected courses, and 40% said their goal was fully completed. About 40% of the NRSs had continued their education by the time they were surveyed (12% at a four-year university and 28% at a community college or at an unidentified school), and 72% planned to reenroll at a Los Rios college in the future. Clearly, these students had only "stopped out," rather than "dropping out."

And finally, 86% of all NRSs rated their Los Rios educational experience as excellent or good (5 or 4), indicating a high degree of satisfaction.

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